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ABSTRACT

This paper's purpose is to illustrate, through the author's personal experiences, that violent actions occur in the world that affect people, countries, and relations in multiple levels and numerous ways. Using autobiographical inquiry, the author narrates how she experienced violence in three different countries in which she has lived. In Cyprus, her home country, she experienced what it means to be a refugee, and what it means to live in an occupied country. In Saudi Arabia, she experienced what it means to be oppressed, and what it means not to be respected as a human being due to gender, religion, culture, and traditions. In the United States, she experienced the consequences of terrorism, destruction, imperialism, and its aftermath. The paper explores issues of power, violence, and "otherness." It focuses on the devastation, destruction, pain, and sadness any activity of terrorism causes. It tries to show that with war, people cannot achieve freedom, and that with power, or with activities that aim in displaying power, people cannot save the world, nor make it a better place. The paper states that the U.S. involvement in the politics of other countries occurs in a way that serves mainly its own purposes. The paper seeks to show, through narrating the author's story, that there are consequences for what the United States does in other countries, offering the example of Cyprus. It also intends to show that education should be the means in making a difference, not power or violence. (Author/BT)

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Politics, Violence, and Education: Other People's Countries

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Abstract

My purpose in this paper is to illustrate, through my personal experiences, that violent actions occur in the world and that these actions affect people, countries, and relations in multiple levels and numerous ways. Through autobiographical inquiry I narrate how I have experienced violence in three different countries I have lived in. In Cyprus, my home country, I have experienced what it means to be a refugee, and what it means to live in an occupied country; in Saudi Arabia, I have experienced what it means to be oppressed, and what it means not to be respected as a human being due to gender, religion, culture, and traditions; and in America I have experienced the consequences of terrorism, destruction, imperialism, and its aftermath. In all three cases violent actions occurred. In the first case there is violence because of the Turkish invasion; in the second case there is violence because of oppression; and in the third case there is violence because of terrorism. It is violence because it has psychological, physiological, and emotional consequences. My purpose is to help eliminate the assumption that only America went through a catastrophe. I intend to explore issues of power, violence, and otherness. My purpose in this paper is to show the devastation, destruction, pain, and sadness any activity of terrorism causes. My purpose is to show that with war we cannot achieve freedom, and that with power, or with activities that aim in displaying power, we cannot save the world, nor can we make it a better place. Getting involved in other countries' business or using other countries to achieve our goals is neither right, nor moral or legal. America's involvement in the politics of other countries occurs in a way that serves mainly its own purposes rather than those of other countries. I discuss how what America does affect other countries. I try to show, by narrating my story, that there are consequences for what America does in other countries, offering the concrete example of my country. At the same time I discuss how Cypriots view America's involvement in Cyprus and in other countries, in order to give possible explanations in regards to the unsympathetic attitude other countries have toward America. I also try to show that education should be the means in making a difference, neither power should it be, nor violence.

"They say that man his home country should love.
And my father says so, often enough.
But my own country has been divided in two.
Which part of the two, then, should I love?"

The verse of this poem echoes in my ears each and every day. The verse of this poem is so many times sung by Cypriots. The verse of this poem was written by a Turkish-Cypriot woman who had experienced the Turkish invasion in Cyprus and who was inspired by this tragic event to write the poem and devote it to Cyprus.

My mother often talks to me about her experiences from the invasion:

"That day I woke up very early in the morning. It was still dawn. I just couldn't sleep any more because it was really hot. The window in my bedroom was wide open but it didn't help at all. Not even the leaves from the trees were moving. Your father was on duty, as a policeman, from the previous night, and your brother, who was three years old, was sleeping. So I decided to take a shower to feel better. When I was done I went to my bedroom to check on your brother who was sleeping next to the window. That window had the best view; you could see the endless sea. I stared out of the window for a while, until I saw something really weird in the sky. I could distinguish something black far away, like black smoke, coming toward us. Then looking at the same direction I noticed that there was also a black spot in the sea. I wondered what that was but then without paying further attention I just shut the window. Few minutes later I heard a constant, deafening noise like somebody was bombarding us. When I opened the window I saw hundreds of military airplanes setting fire against us, and ships that were disembarking thousands and thousands of soldiers. I was panicked. I was petrified. I was terrified. I didn't know what to do or what to think of. I didn't know what was going on. I grabbed the baby from his bed unconsciously…I stopped to think what to do…I couldn't. I felt relieved when I heard your grandmother calling me, desperately, while she was coming down the road, running, toward the house. 'Take the baby and let's get out of here before they kill us. It is war', were her words which to me sounded like a very bad dream. We started running from building to building trying not to go into any open space. We were hiding. We were scared for our lives. I was mostly concerned about the baby. I was holding him very tight in my arms trying to protect him with my body. We were running and I was so scared and exhausted. Your grandmother was at the front and I was behind her with your brother. We were running and together with us hundreds of other people. Finally, we got to a river and we laid down there. The water was shallow enough not to cover us. I put the baby in the river and then I fell on top of him to cover him. Around us I could hear screams, crying, confusion, desperation, panic, and the gunfire, the bullets that were passing over our heads, and the bombs. For a moment I thought of my husband and got terrified because I hadn't heard from him. I thought of my parents, my siblings, my loved ones. I thought of my house and that I didn't lock the door. I thought of the washed clothes that were hanging on the line outside of the house. I thought of…when a sudden scream from my mother-in-law brought me back to the reality. 'The baby…the baby, he is going to die from asphyxia. Get off him right away'. I didn't notice that the water had covered him and he couldn't breathe. He couldn't react because I was on top of him. His face turned black. I was so scared. If your grandmother hadn't noticed him he would have died. We stayed there for many hours. We still didn't know what was going on, but rumors said that Turks had invaded the island. We didn't know what they wanted and how far they could go. The biggest relief that I felt was when I heard your father's voice. Somehow he found out where we were and he came. He told us that he was helping people, but now, it was the army's responsibility. He told us that we had to leave right away and move to a safer place because we were in the war zone. We didn't even stop by our house to take our things with us. We left just like that. We took no clothes, no shoes, no pictures. We thought that this would end pretty soon and then we would be able to return. We were wrong. Twenty-nine years, and we are still waiting…"

A quote from Tolstoy's book *Divine and Human and other stories* (2000) brings in my mind my mother's misfortune. "As happens in …decisive moments in life, in an instant she experienced a mass of feelings and thoughts but at the same time did not yet understand, did not believe her own misfortune" (p. 30). Actually, nobody believed his or her own misfortune in Cyprus in 1974, when the Turkish invasion took place.

Cyprus is an island in the Mediterranean Sea that connects three continents. It is situated among Europe, Africa, and Asia. Due to its geographic position Cyprus has the advantage of being at a very important crossroad, a position of a great economic, and

strategic importance. But this gives Cyprus a great disadvantage as well, that is, all neighboring countries want to conquer this little island in order to take advantage of the importance and the benefits derived from its location. For this reason Cyprus has experienced the hostile mood of so many countries, beginning from the ancient years until now. For many years Cyprus was a British colony. Cypriots managed to free the island from the British sovereignty, after they had struggled for liberty for five years, from 1955-1959. This liberation fight gave the island its independency, and assisted in the birth and establishment of the Republic of Cyprus in the 1960s. But British were certainly not the only, and as it was soon to be proved, nor the last conquerors of the island. In 1974 Turkey invaded Cyprus, claiming that the reason for doing so was to protect Turkish-Cypriots who were living on the island.

Ever since, Cyprus has been occupied. Twenty-nine years and Turks still occupy one-third of the island. Twenty-nine years and we are still not allowed to visit our parents' and great grandparents' houses, villages, the places where they were born and lived for so many years. Twenty-nine years and the presence of the Turkish troops and the UN along the so-called 'green line' is so obvious. We still face, each and every day, the huge flag of Turkey, which was constructed on the foot of Pentadaktylos Mountain twenty-nine years ago. *Invasion*, *refugees*, *rape*, *missing persons*, *lost country*, and a million other violent words still exist in our vocabulary, and surround our minds.

After these events my family decided to move to a better place, a place that would give them the opportunity to remake their lives. Therefore, we moved to Saudi Arabia. In Saudi Arabia, even foreigners, have to respect the Arabic religion, culture, traditions, and obey the Islamic law. The relationship is a one-way one, because they did not respect our religion, tradition: sense of law. I came to see this is violence as well. Violence is abuse, psychological or physiological, it is still abuse. Violence causes pain, whether it is in the psyche or the body. The Islamic law spreads fanaticism and terror. The Islam I experience is about blind dedication and extremism. I had lived in Saudi Arabia for ten years, and without constrains I declare that what I had experienced was unique, something I have never experienced elsewhere.

A few years ago I was in Cyprus for vacation. Every night the main titles of the news were about the constructions British together with Americans were doing in the area of Akamas, a village protected by environmental organizations in Cyprus. Their intention was to put a huge antenna in that area which would enable them to control the whole area in the Mediterranean Sea and Asia. When it was the war in Iraq the British military bases that are established in Cyprus were getting ready to be used for attacks.

Cyprus: the island of Aphrodite; the island of the Goddess of Beauty. Cyprus: the place with the only divided capital city in Europe. Cyprus: the place to be used in any action taken against Iraq; the place that is being used for military purposes to control the whole area around Cyprus. Cyprus…how can such a small place combine such a beauty and such a terror at the same time? Cyprus is the place that carries all these contradictory terms. Who has asked for that? Its inhabitants? Certainly not.

In the context of the tragedy of September 11th I take the opportunity to think about the events through my own lenses. I would like to respond to numerous comments that I hear quite often saying, "Other countries didn't help us" and wondering, "why do they hate us". But the issue, as I try to illustrate in this paper, is not merely a matter of hate or a matter of help. To me, coming from another country and having other kinds of

experiences, and not yet being deeply immersed in the American society, the issue is the term "the other". "Otherness" (Smith, 1999) is a concept that creates distance and exclusion, and it often causes feelings of competency, tension, and aversion. My view is that the United States' politics and their actions give the message that non-Americans are "the others"; they are foreigners; they are aliens (a term mentioned in most of the governmental documents). "Alien" is a term that reminds one of something that comes from the outer space, from another planet—not the same kind of being. But is America the only country that exists in this world? They broadcast the message every day that the United States is the most powerful country in the world, and therefore every other country is the lever and the means through which they can achieve their goals. Materialism is a major component of the philosophy of these politics. Materialism is the idea that the more objects people possess the better their life will be. This was the message that President Bush gave to Americans when he encouraged people to go shopping and not to let the tragic events of 9-11 change their way of life. But this is a money-oriented philosophy that does not respect any democratic and other ethical values, and it drives people to step over dead bodies. It is based on the win/lose paradigm of human interaction, which is the authoritarian approach: "I get my way; you don't get yours" (Covey, 1989, p.207). This is the philosophy that encourages people to use position, power, credentials, possessions, or personality to get their way.

Trying to answer questions such as "why do they hate us?" and respond to comments such as "other countries didn't help us" we need to think about all the politics that take place at international level. We need to think that what America experienced on September 11th other countries may have experienced long time ago, or they may still experience. That was a reminder that America is not the only place on the world or that America is not the whole world. What America is going through now is something familiar, in one way or another, to numerous other countries. What America is going through now, is what my home country, Cyprus, goes through every day, for some twenty-nine years now, regarding sadness, uncertainty, feelings of devastation, and loss. Sometimes I think to myself where are other countries at these moments that America needs help? Maybe other countries offered their help, but the U.S. government never told us either on purpose or out of negligence. Or maybe other countries did not offer their help indeed. And again if this is the case there must be a reason and, perhaps, a logical explanation for this. But why? If America gets involved in other countries' matters trying to help them out, why are they so ungrateful and why they do not help America in return, now that it needs their help? One possible answer to this question may be that others view things from a different standpoint than America does. The help that America offers to other countries might be help from America's perspective, but hindrance from others' perspective. Involvement exists because of interests, and thus not all parties benefit from this involvement. The fact is that everyone acts for one's own interest whenever there is opportunity, without being concerned with others' interests. The question then may be reformulated into: Is American help deemed helpful by those who receive it? What kind of help does it offer and why? Another possible answer to the question raised before may be that other countries theorize that actions are being taken against them for which they have to find solutions on their own, fighting at the same time against the others who try to take advantage of the situation. Or it could be that other countries think that it is America's turn to feel the pain, the injustice, the despair, and the

helplessness, which they have felt themselves, and are very familiar with such feelings. Or it could be that other countries want to help but they cannot either because they do not have the power or because they think that America, powerful as it is, can help itself.

In trying to explain how America's actions affect other countries I refer to the example of my country. Cyprus has been occupied for twenty-nine years. What I am wondering about is why nobody does something about this situation. America claims that its aim is to help establish democracy and peace in the world, to help make the world a better place. What exactly we mean by saying "to make the world a better place" is another huge issue. Better place for whom? For whose interest? From whose perspective? But if the case is to establish justice and peace in the world, and make it a better place why doesn't America help Cyprus become free again? We, Cypriots, think that the reason is that America has nothing to gain from Cyprus, a country with no oil or other valuable sources that may interest America, whereas it has a lot to gain by ensuring that it is in good terms with Turkey, or make Turkey think that the two countries are in good terms. This is the case now as it was twenty-nine years ago when they didn't prevent Turkish invasion. We, Cypriots, know that there are many reasons and motives behind those they tell us about the occurrence of the Turkish invasion. What we know is that in Greece a military coup occurred. This coup was unwanted by Greeks. This coup was planning to overthrow Cyprus' government as well. Turkey, who always sought reasons to invade Cyprus, found the opportunity to do so. Claiming that they were protecting Turkish-Cypriots who were living on the island, they invaded it. But where was America at that time? America, who wants to make sure that stability and peace exists in the world? It is an established fact that America was involved in this aggressive situation. If this is not the case, then why is this small island still occupied? Many Cypriots think that the reason for this is that the situation as it is, better serves America's interests for power and its need to be able to control Middle East, where issues with oil exist, from an area that is close to Middle East. Cyprus is that place close to Middle East and at the same time small enough not to be able to react or fight back in the case of any invasion, as it happened indeed. And Turkey was probably an easy way for America to camouflage its actions and its real motives. In other words, Cypriots believe that America let Turkey attack Cyprus, so that Americans, who are in good terms with Turkey, use Cyprus to control the area. At the same time, America, to hide its real motives, pretends that it wants to help resolve Cyprus problem. By mediating the dialogues America manages not to disclose its real face. Why does America take the role of mediator in the dialogues aiming, as claimed, in the resolution of the Cyprus problem? Many Cypriots think that Americans take part in the dialogues only to better control the discussions and to ensure that the situation will remain as it is, or that it will take a direction that will still serve America's economic and political interests. And this is part of the reason that Cyprus can't make it by itself: there are all those interests going on with the most powerful countries being involved, that do not allow Cyprus to act independently. If Cyprus makes a decision that other countries do not favor, they threaten Cyprus that if it does not change its decision they will take action against it. How can America be so tolerant with such an unfair situation? America that claims that it acts with fair rules. Why don't they attack Turkey as they recently did with Iraq? And how about America's claim that they want to eliminate terrorism? Isn't the case of Cyprus an example of terrorism? Why don't they help stop terrorism in Cyprus that has

gone on for twenty-nine years and they only go after terrorists who have appeared, at least some of them, in the most recent years?

The war against Iraq is the most recent example of violence and terrorism. It is the most recent example of what America does in other countries. Terms such as imposition, oppression, power, and display of power can be used in this case. What I wonder about is what is the rational for the actions of U.S.? Why does it get involved into other countries' business? Why does it think that it can save the world? Who is it to save the world, and who asked America to do so? Who said that because it has power it has the right to impose its opinion, beliefs, and interests on others? And what are the means it uses to eradicate war and terrorism? War and terrorism? Do we terminate violence by using violence? And how can one claim that one aims in saving people since one only achieves in killing them? How can it claim that it does whatever it does in the name of liberty and freedom, since war is what it uses to achieve this? U.S. declares that it does what it does so that people in Iraq can live in a free and democratic country. But how can this happen, since many of those people are now dead, mutilated, or victims of the war? I question the motives and the reasons for which this occurred. I question the reasons they have been giving for this war. Considering that there were not enough justifiable reasons for the war, it prompts me to think that there are hidden reasons than what we think, that we, citizens, are not supposed to know. I think that the real reasons have to do with power, money, expansion of an empire, and economic interests rather than liberty and democracy.

My intention in this paper is not only to ask "Why?" and "whose fault is it?" My purpose is to contribute in the sharing of perspectives and to continue the dialogue. Also, my purpose is to make a contribution as an educator to what should be done. Is there any way that we can avoid such events of violence in the future? Is there any way that we can help our children be sensitive about these issues? The best way I see, and the most effective one, is through education. Although education is sponsored and funded by the states being criticized, each educator can make a difference through his or her teaching. My obligation as an educator is to investigate and learn. My obligation is to help my students through teaching see who they are and who they want to become; to influence their lives; to help them create their lives; to help new generations meet the world; to help humanity remake itself (Schubert, 1999). My obligation is to offer them opportunities for development of critical thinking, rather than imposing on them what to know, what to think, and what to say. Do we, for instance, tell our students that we act in a certain way because we are the most powerful, because we are in danger by terrorists, because people in other countries are not happy with their government, and thus we have to take action? Is to shut the windows of my classroom and continue with the topic that I am "supposed" to teach the best way to confront what is going on in the world? Or is it to stand together with my students in front of the window of my classroom, to turn on the radio and the television, read the newspaper and discuss multiple meanings of it a better way to deal with it (Page, 2001)?

What I need to do, as educator, is to allow my students participate in the world in order to understand that they are part of it and that with their actions affect humanity and help the world become a better or a worse place. It is an excellent way to help them become good and conscious citizens, and prevent future acts of terrorism. My obligation is to teach issues of violence at school. Together, inspired from everyday life incidents,

we must give the message that violence is bad. I must search, investigate, and learn together with my students. They need to feel free to express their feelings and emotions, and learn from them and from each other. I need to use curriculum in a way that will help my students understand "the other", learn to respect and embrace difference and diversity and learn from it as well as criticize it. It is from diversity that we form a shared identity among ourselves, and we are enabled to live in community with people who do not look like us. In this way they will understand that there is no single true or a unique answer to what goes on in the world (Phillips & Burbules, 2000), rather each of us gives answers to the questions, and these answers are in accord to one's background and experiences. And each of us is responsible to judge whether a certain response is good enough for ourselves and for humanity or if we need to investigate more and explore another answer, another possibility. Also, through development of critical thinking students—future citizens—can judge if something is good or evil, or if it is right or wrong. Through critical thinking they will be able to distinguish good news, programs, and activities from bad ones. As an educator I am responsible to help my students make the world a better place. This is probably the best action I can take. What we all need to keep in mind is that it is not just I or just you (Covey, 1989), but it's all of us instead, and that we, educators, "teach to change lives" (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 277).

Coexistence is a condition in which human beings live. Learning to coexist is a great thing to do because this means that people respect the life of other people and they acknowledge that they exist because other people exist. This enables people to appreciate and respect diversity, and to seek benefits out of it. The need for a more humanitarian education is obvious. Education should be based upon human relationships; it should create conditions for learning from each other, and it should value different perspectives, interdependency, understanding, and mutuality among other principles. Education should give students valuable luggage to carry with them in the journey of their lives. Within it there should be tools that help them have a good and ethical life, one that is worth living and sharing life. Among the tools should be one that enables them to search, investigate and find out the truth rather than blindly believing what others say. This will help them not to fall into the trap of becoming mere followers, but rather enable them to lead their own lives. It will enable them to reach their own conclusions based on reason and logical analysis. This is what Buddha claimed, too, that "after careful observation and analysis, when it agrees with reason and it will benefit one and all, then accept it [the truth] and live by it" (Dyer, 1998, p.5). The ancient saying "knowing half the truth is worse than knowing nothing" reveals a lot as to why we need to have critical thinking that averts us of becoming marionettes. Another tool should be one that helps people recognize the good, the beautiful, and the worthwhile. Education should offer something deeper than mere knowledge and skills. It should offer feelings that go deep inside and reach our hearts. As Helen Keller said:

> The best and the most beautiful things
> in the world cannot be seen
> or even touched.
> They must be felt with the heart.

By having this kind of education we can avoid future acts of terrorism. This is the best and the most effective way to prevent violence.

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